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OPEN LETTER TO THE PAGAN AND DRUID COMMUNITY

By Ellen Everett Hopman

In May of 1988 I attended my first Rites of Spring celebration in Massachusetts. This event came two weeks after my first Druid campout with ADF Druids from New York, Connecticut and Massachusetts.

At RItes I was asked about my impressions of the gathering by a woman who had been attending for many years. My immediate response was that the Pagan folk are some of the nicest, most open and friendly people I have ever been privilaged to meet. My second observation, however, was that I really was surprised at the general level of ill-health I was observing all around me.

Pagans purport to be the caretakers and representatives of the Earth Mother and claim to worship Her by honoring and respecting Her resources, beauty and power. How is it possible that pagans are forgetting the Earth element in themselves?

I've observed a lot of smoking, alcol consumption, and obesity at the gatherings I've attended. I have a trained eye, from being an herbal "healer," and I could see the effects of diets rich in fried foods, sugars,
and animal fat. Faces were pasty with unhealthy skin. At least half of the population was grossly overweight.

My reaction to all this is to speak out with a grave sense of urgency. How authentic can our concern for the Earth be if we, who are the pieces of her who move around, are polluted and sick? If we presume to heal the Earth shouldn't we start with our won bodies and lives first?

I have carefully read all the DP's well as innumerable books on Celtic history and tradition. Most of my concept of Druid spirituality comes, of necessity, from the writings of Isaac Bonewits. I ahve looked to other ADF memebrs to clarify some pointys as well. As I study the Celtic deities and work to incorporate their Archetypes and qualities into my psyche I am

pleased and heartened by the experience. Yet as a member of the ADF community I feel there is one more difficult point I feel I must address.

In my contact with ADF Druids I continually hear remarks about "sloppy Wiccan ritual" and "Sloppy magic." EVery time I hear this kind of back-biting it really saddens me. The Pagan community is so small and fragile, and so vulnerable to attack from outside forces that I cannot fathom what good these kinds of seperations and disunities can accomplish.

What I have seen of ADF ritual so far has been an organized and almost Ecclesiastical forumla that made me feel I was in a Christian Cathedral. We have much to learn from the energy and abandon of the Wiccan tradition. I hope that we as Druids are not already on the path to stodgy Orthidoxy.

Another point about the rituals I have seen : Every participant is assigned a rile and given a perceived forumla to work with. This sort of approach may be fine for huge, impersonal public rites, but it tends to obliterate the unique concerns and needs of individuals.

I have yet to see a group of ADF Druids sit down with each other or with workshop participants and inquire as to the particular needs and life changes of the individuals involved.

Ritual is a powerful tool for banishing and awakening powers and forces inside ourselves. If we persist in trying to stick to a formula in our rituals we are no differnet than the average religion that looks for blind comformity in its adherants and leaves the deep magical work of transformation to mental health professionals.

My personal conclusion is that I would like to see less emphasis on alchol consumption at lareg gathersing and more of an attempt to look at who we are, where we are, and how we can use the powerful energies of the Celtic pantheon to heal ourselves and learn to touch our own Divinity.

Well, I've probably managed to insult everybody this time! The clan mother archetype is strong in me these days. Please know that I really love you all and I wish you health and joy.